



We're writing on behalf of the Governing Body to ask for your help in determining the future of the Dunchurch Schools' Federation.

This letter is the start of three separate consultations with our community; staff, children, parents and the wider community. The three consultations are independent of each other; no one decision made will influence the other two. Below is a brief overview of each consultation. Each also has a Frequently Asked Questions document which contains more in depth information, including how you can respond to each consultation.

The first consultation concerns the question of whether Dunchurch Infant School and Nursery should become a Church of England school like Dunchurch Boughton Juniors. This would return Dunchurch Infant School and Nursery to its original status as a Church of England School as was the case until the 1970s and would also bring both the infant and junior school into the same family of schools. This consultation only relates directly to the Infants, not the Juniors.

The second is to consider whether both schools within the federation should become academies and join the Coventry Diocesan Multi Academy Trust. The board of governors believe that this will help the school to maintain and improve on the standards established at the two schools.

The third consultation relates to the admissions policy of Dunchurch Boughton Junior School and is possibly less significant than the first two. It is a requirement that any change to an admissions policy, no matter how small, should be made only following a consultation. The policy in this case has only one change and that is to remove the part where church attendance increases a child's chances of securing a place at the school. This is in line with our local diocese's preference for school admission policies.

The Governing Body will only make a final decision once we have heard and taken into account the opinions from all in our community. Attached to this letter is an outline of all three proposals and a FAQ section which aims to raise and answer what we believe are most likely to be the common questions, although there will almost certainly be questions which arise over the next few months.

The governors have carefully considered the timing of these consultations. The governors originally decided to hold a consultation on all three matters in early 2020, but decided to not consult during the Spring/Summer because of COVID. In September this decision was revisited. With no end in sight for the pandemic, it was thought we wouldn't wait any longer, particularly as the school had successfully held a series of meetings for parents online which have been well attended. This means we are confident that people can give their views during the current time. We plan to hold virtual meetings with all stakeholders and you will receive more information regarding these in due course. You will also receive a questionnaire and we urge you to return your questions and comments to us, both positive and negative, to help us in the decision making process.

We would like to sign off with our best wishes to you all during these challenging times.

Lindsey Wright

Ian Dewes

Consultation 1: Should Dunchurch Infant School and Nursery become a Church of England school?

The rationale for considering whether Dunchurch Infants and Nursery should become a Church of England school?

One of the most important things for the governing board of the federation over the last few years is to make sure that both schools work closely together for the benefit of pupils. After the schools' federated, we created a vision for where we wanted the two schools to be in five years' time and we think Dunchurch Infants and Nursery becoming a Church school would help to bring the two schools even closer together and help us achieve our aims:

Our vision for the federation	How we think becoming a Church school would support this?
Being a single school community, with clear values and aspirations that inspire each child to reach their full potential	If DISN were to become a Church school it would bring the two schools in the federation closer together and remove one of the most significant differences between the schools.
Having a school community in which everyone feels loved, respected and valued	Such aspirations are very much in line with the C. of E.'s Vision for Education .
Delivering an enriching curriculum, through which all children are engaged and enjoy learning	The additional money available from the Boughton Educational Trust (see below) would provide additional opportunities for our youngest children.

Dunchurch Infant School has a plaque in the hall explaining how it was built as a Church school. When what is now called Dunchurch Boughton Junior School was built in 1974 it became a Church school and the Infants stopped being part of the Church family. Nobody is sure why this is, but governors are aware that this proposal will be returning to Infant School to its previous status.

Originally the school on the site of Dunchurch Infants and Nursery was able to access financial support from the Boughton Educational Trust. This is an organisation which invested a legacy from Francis Boughton and the returns of which are given to Church schools in Dunchurch. Currently, this is only to be used by the Juniors, but if Dunchurch Infants were to join the Church family it would enable them to benefit from the Boughton Educational Trust's support too.

We think that the values in Church of England's Vision for Education (below) are equally applicable to all children and families, regardless of their religious beliefs.

- Educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills
- Educating for hope and aspiration
- Educating for community and living well together
- Educating for dignity and respect

Frequently Asked Questions

I am not a Christian and I do not want my child preached to or converted. Will this happen if the Infants became a Church school?

Church schools exist for all pupils regardless of whether they have other faiths, or are atheists or agnostics. We believe our third consultation on removing the faith criteria in our admissions authority shows our commitment to be open to all. All Church of England schools are instructed to be invitational, meaning

saying prayers and singing hymns are always optional. The school would still teach children about all major religions as part of the Religious Education curriculum.

Should the Church have a role in running schools?

The school is led by the governing body who have appointed Ian Dewes to run day-to-day operations. In the case of Church of England schools they are part of the Coventry Diocese family who provide a certain amount of support. We have found this to be useful at Dunchurch Juniors and we would like to benefit from this at Dunchurch Infants. As useful as this support is, the Diocese do not get involved in the day-to-day running of the school. All Church schools have some spaces on the governing board which are appointed by the local Church, however as Dunchurch Infants are federated with a Church school already, there is already church representation on our board, so there would be no change.

When would this change take place?

The process requires the agreement of the local authority and Diocese of Coventry, as well as the governing body. We would aim for the change to take place in September 2021.

Update 17th December: A meeting for parents and the wide community was held on 14th December. Notes on this are available at the end of this document.

Consultation 2: Should both Dunchurch Infant School and Nursery and Dunchurch Boughton Church of England Junior School join the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust?

The rationale for considering the option of becoming an Academy

Over the last couple of years, the capacity for Warwickshire Local Authority to support maintained schools has decreased significantly and this will be reduced further in the future. The impact of this is being seen in the diminishing support services available to our schools. We still have a good relationship with Warwickshire and this would continue, but the governors are mindful that it is part of their role to consider other options.

School budgets have become increasingly constrained, with the governors recognising that the outstanding curriculum and learning opportunities we provide could be at risk unless we can share the costs and availability of these services across a wider pupil and school cohort.

Both the infant and junior school are considered by Ofsted to be outstanding and, as such, we have much to offer to the family of schools within the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust (or DMAT), but also much to lose if we do not continue to strive to do the best for our children both now and in the future.

We have used the following four criteria to guide our thinking:

1. What is in the best interests of the children and staff in our schools, both now and looking ahead to those who will attend in the years to come?
2. How can we best preserve the schools' distinctive vision and values?
3. How can we ensure that we will retain a significant role in running our school at a local level?
4. How can we maintain an enhanced curriculum, excellent learning opportunities and access to support services?

Much has been said, good and bad about academisation. It is certainly not the panacea for all schools' challenges and a lot depends on the approach to member schools being able to participate in the particular trust's ethos, decision making and strategy development.

Academy benefits are typically that a trust has the ability to source a wider range of services that are shared amongst the schools within the trust and are not funded just by one school. The academy structure also often provides much wider staff development and advancement because of the larger pool of opportunities. It also enables stronger staff recruitment in a challenging market.

Perceived disadvantages include the possibility of reducing the local relationship, the Heads being accountable to a Chief Executive and Trustee Board (as opposed to the Local Authority and Governing Body). In addition, the academisation transition is initially demanding and time consuming. Whilst staff transfer on existing terms and conditions under the TUPE regulations (Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment) there are sometimes concerns about what may be expected of staff in this new structure.

At the heart of any decisions we make about the future of the Dunchurch Schools Federation is the drive to continue to provide an outstanding education for our children both now and in the future. We have therefore concluded that seeking to join, benefit from and become influential in the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust is potentially our best route forward. It is this option that the Governors have agreed we should consult on.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded schools which are independent of the Local Authority. Funding is received directly from the Department for Education, instead of the Local Authority, giving the academy trust more control over spending. Originally, underperforming schools were turned into academies to help the school

improve rapidly, however in 2010 the Government extended the opportunity to convert to academy status to all schools that are successful and performing well.

Academy trusts are education charities that are set up purely for the purpose of running and improving schools. They are run by a board of trustees who appoint someone to oversee the school’s day-to-day work. Trustees have strict duties under charity law and company law. Trustees hold public office – they do not run the trust for private interest. Multi Academy Trusts are charities and DMAT has one single Object in its Articles of Association – namely “to advance for the public benefit of education.

What sort of schools have we currently in our federation?

Dunchurch Infants is a Foundation School and Dunchurch Boughton Juniors is Voluntary Aided. Both are maintained by the local authority. One of the characteristics of both of these types of schools is that they are more autonomous than many local authority schools (often known as Community Schools). For example, the governors employ the staff and set admissions criteria, whereas in most maintained schools, this is the responsibility of the local authority. In this respect, both our schools share some similarities to academies. The table below compares the feature of different types of schools.

	LA Community	Foundation (like the Infants)	Voluntary Aided (like the Juniors)	Academy in an academy trust
Who employs staff?	The LA	The governing board	The governing board	The governing board of the trust.
Admissions	The LA	The governing board	The governing board	The governing board of the trust.
Who owns the land?	The LA	Foundation (governors)	Trustees (governors)	The governing board of the trust.
Religious affiliation	None	Most have a religious foundation. Dunchurch Infants doesn’t which is unusual. Technically, it is a ‘foundation school without foundation’	Church of England	Schools can be Church or not. Currently all schools in the Coventry Diocese Multi Academy Trust are Church of England, but it is not a requirement.

In considering academy status the governors noted that there would be less of a transition for our two schools than if we were community schools.

What is the difference between a standalone academy and an academy trust?

Five to ten years ago many schools were encouraged to become academies on their own. While many schools, particularly large ones have continued to be a standalone academy (sometimes known as Single Academy Trusts), it is now generally considered to be better to be part of a group of academies, known as an academy trust or Multi Academy Trust. A group of academies are able to share services such as finance and human resources and achieve economies of scale. While this does mean some autonomy is given to the trust, the governors have considered this and believe the security of being part of a bigger organisation and the increased opportunities for collaboration would be very beneficial.

Why are the governing board of the school considering academy status?

We see the value in being part of a larger group. At the moment, a lot of responsibility lies on the shoulders of the governing board and the school leaders; in a trust this is shared by those who work for the central team and the board of trustees. Being part of the trust will give the chance to collaborate with a larger group of schools and also cement our relationship with Leamington Hastings.

We think academy trusts are held to account to a higher standard operationally than maintained schools and therefore this move will help to safeguard the education we provide for our pupils. Academy trusts are required to have an independent financial audit annually and to publish their accounts. They are also required to disclose certain details of pay. If the Education Skills and Funding Agency investigates a trust, the investigation report is published on the government’s website. There is no similar requirement on local

authorities to publish investigation reports or disclose salaries of senior leaders' pay and audits rarely happen.

Why are we considering joining The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust?

We have a good understanding of the work of the trust. One of our governors is also the chair of their board of trustees and Mr. Dewes is also a trustee. Our chair of governors is a governor at two other schools which have joined the trust. These experiences have given us an insight into what being in the trust would be like.

We think the trust is a good fit for us because it has around a dozen staff who will be able to support the school. They provide services such as human resources, finance, premises and operations. We feel that this will offer the school better services than what we currently receive from the local authority.

The Trust gives every school within the trust twelve days school improvement support each year. Currently both our schools buy a similar service, but due to the cost this is only for three days a year. Several members of our staff team have worked with the Head of School Improvement at the trust and so know that the support will not just be more extensive, but also be of high quality.

Other options have been considered, but governors believe joining a fairly large trust would be best as they are able to offer more comprehensive support services to schools.

Which other schools are part of The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust?

There are eighteen schools in the trust, all of which are in Coventry and Warwickshire. There is a mixture of primary, secondary, infant and junior including our close neighbours, Leamington Hastings who feed into the Juniors. A full list of schools can be found [here](#).

What is the ethos of The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust?

The Core Mission of The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust is to build a better future for all within our Academies who in turn will positively impact their communities. Together, the trust aims to help children "pursue life in all its fullness". More can be found on this [here](#).

How does governance work in an academy trust?

Dunchurch would still have a governing board, but there would be two additional layers of governance; a board of trustees and a smaller group called members. The Trustees are responsible for the strategic running of the trust. The Members sign the official documents for the company (which set out its core purpose, i.e. provision of education), they also have the power to appoint the trustees and amend the official documents. We feel that the added layers of governance will share the governance load and provide extra checks and balance on the governance processes that are already in place. The school would still have parent and staff representatives on the local governing board.

Will the schools lose their sense of identity?

The governors did not want to join a trust that forces a corporate identity on each of its schools. The school's names and uniform won't change and while the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust's logo would appear on the school sign, website, letter headed paper, etc. it would be alongside the badge of either the Infants or Juniors. We have discussed this with the leadership of the trust and they have reassured us that the emphasis would still be on providing high quality education for our local community and we would still be able to have our own vision, as long as it doesn't work against the Trust's.

Will becoming an academy change the finances of the schools?

Currently the government give money to the local authority who then give money to our two schools, keeping some money to pay for services they offer. If we become an academy, the government will give money to the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust who would, like the local authority, keep some money for services they offer. It is difficult to make direct comparisons as the services offered are significantly different; generally, the services from the trust are more extensive and we believe they are of a better quality. Despite this improvement in services, we do not expect to be worse, or better off financially.

What would becoming an academy mean for children with special educational needs and disabilities?

There would be no change in this area. The schools currently buy in support from the local authority and this would be something we would continue to do. The local authority have certain statutory duties relating to children with particular needs and this remains the case when schools become academies.

What does it mean for staff?

All staff would transfer their employment under TUPE legislation from their current employer, to the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust. We will also consulting with our staff and their trade unions to seek their views. Staff views are very important to the governors and will be taken into account. We currently use the local authority for HR support and this would switch to the trust. We think this would be an improvement and staff would benefit. We think that joining the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust would be beneficial to staff because it would give opportunities for positive collaborative working.

What does 'working collaboratively' mean in practical day to day terms? Some information on the tangible benefits for the children would help make a more informed decision.

Working collaboratively means that we would be able to offer each other support, share resources, best practise and work together to plan and implement new initiatives. In practical terms, there would be a range of different ways that this may happen:

- Opportunities to visit each other's schools, shared staff meetings and staff training. Groups of staff working together across the trust schools can plan and implement new strategies or refine existing practise.
- The headteachers meet regularly to share what is going well in their respective schools and plan for future school improvement.
- Subject leaders at the trust's schools meet regularly and review their subjects.
- A network of support for each teaching phase (Early Years, KS1 and KS2) established so that for example the Early Years teams can share good practice.
- The trust holds joint training sessions, giving access to a greater range of professional development opportunities.
- The tangible benefits we envisage for the children would be continual improvements to the curriculum and to the teaching and learning strategies we use.

Would it be possible to leave the trust in the future if it was considered to not be meeting our needs and aims?

There is a process to leave a trust and join another trust although this can only be done with the permission of the Regional Schools Commissioner. There is not a route back to Local Authority control. However, we believe the process of due diligence (a period where detailed research is undertaken) is about understanding and overcoming any concerns that might emerge before the final decision is made.

How will it affect the children's education?

In the short-term nothing would change; children will continue to study the curriculum we have developed and be taught by the same staff. We think in the medium to long-term we would benefit from the improved services relating to school improvement and the improved support in areas like HR, finance and operations and this will benefit the pupils in the two schools. We also think the regulatory framework within which academies operate will help to safeguard the educational provision for future cohorts of pupils.

What will happen to the uniform?

There will be no change to the uniform.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

No.

Are academies still accountable for their performance?

Like all schools, academies are in the first instance accountable to the learners they serve and their respective parents and carers. Academies still have to meet government performance expectations concerning progress of all children across all key stages, and they are still inspected by Ofsted. Although academies can innovate and change the curriculum, they still must ensure pupils leave having achieved their full potential across a broad and balanced range of subjects. Being part of an academy trust brings an extra level of challenge which we welcome; the trust will monitor what we do for our children to make sure it stays at a high standard. The local authority do this currently, but only for schools which are causing concern. It has been some years since they have supported Dunchurch in this way and so we would welcome the support and challenge that joining The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust would bring.

When would this change take place?

Schools can change to Academy status within 3-4 months of consulting with parents and carers. If we go ahead, we would aim to become an academy and join on 1st September 2021.

Update 17th December: A meeting for parents and the wide community was held on 14th December. Notes on this are available at the end of this document.

Consultation 3: Should the faith criteria be removed from Dunchurch Boughton Junior School's admissions policy?

The rationale for removing the faith criteria

Like all schools, Dunchurch Boughton Junior has oversubscription criteria, so that if there are more applicants than there are places, we are able to decide who is accepted into the school. The school has traditionally give partial priority to children whose parents or guardians are regular (monthly) practising Christians, for six months prior to the date of application. This could be at any church or religious group as recognised by the *Churches Together in Britain and Northern Ireland* document. The view of the Church of England is that church schools should be open to all children regardless of their (or their parents') religious beliefs and so we would like that to be reflected in our admissions policy.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many pupils/families is this likely to affect?

There are usually no more than one or two families a year who apply to meet this particular criteria.

What is the view of the Coventry Diocese/St. Peter's Church?

Both are in support of the proposal.

Would this dilute the Christian ethos of the school?

An important part of our ethos is to be inclusive to all, whether they are Christians or not, therefore we believe this would support our ethos.

When would these changes take place?

This proposal would change the admissions policy for those pupils entering the school in September 2022.

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Consultation Meeting
public 15.12.2020.doc

How can you share your views?

Parents and the wider community can tell us your thoughts via [this form](#) or <https://tinyurl.com/y6elm2wn>. Alternatively, you can write using the following details:

Lindsey Wright, Chair of Governors
c/o Dunchurch Infant School
School St.
Dunchurch
CV22 6PA

If writing please state whether you agree, disagree or have no opinion, for each of the three consultations, plus any other comments or questions you have.

There will be an online meeting for parents at 7.00PM on Tuesday 15th December. Please contact either school office for a link.

The consultation ends at midday on 29th January 2021.